CASE IS RESTED BY PROSECUTION

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Sam Bowers Charged in Dahmer Death

By W. F. MINOR
(Times-Picayune Staff Correspondent)

HATTIESBURG, Miss. — Mississippi rested its case late Thursday in a bid to convict former Klan imperial wizard Sam Bowers for the nightrider murder of Negro voting leader Vernon Dahmer near here three years ago.

Hard driving prosecutors James Finch and James Dukes buttressed their case Thursday with the testimony of Bill Roy Pitts, a slow-speaking former Klansman who turned state's evidence over a year ago and is under a life sentence in the Dahmer case.

Pitts, who admitted being one of eight Klansmen on a firebombing detail which went to Dahmer's home in the early hours of Jan. 10, 1966, told the court Bowers gave the order for the "burning and annihilation" of Dahmer.

TOLD BY BOWERS

After the Dahmer "project" the 25-year-old Pitts said he had been told by Bowers not to worry about ever being prosecuted because "nobody is going to be

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convicted in Mississippi for killing a Negro."

In his six-hour stay on the witness stand, Pitts confirmed the testimony given Wednesday by another former Klansman, T. Webber Rogers, that Bowers as a top official of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan personally issued the order to a Klan unit in Jones County to carry out the "hit" on Dahmer.

Rogers told the court he was a member of a team which made a "dry run" on the Dahmer job but did not go on the firebombing mission which resulted in the destruction of Dahmer's rural home and resulted in his death 15 hours later from bronchial damage done by the fire.

"You did help to kill him (Dahmer), didn't you?" District Attorney Finch asked Pitts. "Yes sir," the young ex-Klansman declared.

"Under whose order and by whose direction?", Finch continued.

"By the orders of Sam Bowers," Pitts responded.

During the long witness stand appearance of Pitts the former upholstery man, who has been under protection by federal marshals since making a confession to the FBI on Sept. 30, 1967, identified a pistol found outside the burned Dahmer home as the one he lost the night of the Dahmer raid.

PISTOL IDENTIFIED

He said that he could identify the pistol because it had a part of a pin sheared off while he had owned it. He said he had carried the pistol with him the night of the Dahmer murder in a quick draw holster.

Pitts described how two carloads of Jones County Klansmen drove up to the Dahmer residence and pitched jugs of gasoline through a front picture window and tossed in a torch to set off a raging fire.

He said he could hear the voices of some persons inside the house and that he heard an exchange of gunfire between the armed Klansmen and the house.

FLAT TIRE

One of the two automobiles used on the raid had been hit by gunfire and one of the tires went flat as they drove away, Pitts related.

The automobile was abandoned several miles down the road, he said, and all eight men drove away in the other car.

Pitts testified Bowers angrily ordered the carrying out of the mission against Dahmer during a secret meeting in late December, 1965 at which he told Klansmen gathered in a farm shack that he "needed to build his prestige prior to the House Un-American Activities Committee Klan investigation which was slated to begin in January, 1966.

"He said, 'the South will rise again,' " Pitts declared.

The Dahmer project, he said, was a state level mission of the White Knights since it involved one county group going into another country.

'BEST UNIT'

Unit 4 of the White Knights in Jones County was chosen, he said, because it was the "best military unit in the state."

Under questioning by Finch, Pitts said "they were the best men to handle weapons and explosives."

Pitts said he was not originally scheduled to go on the "Dahmer project" but was picked up as a last-minute replacement.

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He told of the meeting at a restaurant in Laurel owned by Deavours Nix whom Pitts described as the chief investigator for the White Knights, shortly before the firebomb detail departed on its mission.

At that get-together in the cafe Pitts said that Bowers was present.

Pitts conceded on the witness stand that he had been paid $5,600 by the FBI in the past 15 months because he was unable to remain in the state with any feeling of safety.

He was asked by Defense Attorney Lawrence Arrington where he was staying while he is in Hattiesburg to appear in the trial.

"I don't want them kluxers to know," Pitts declared as he first refused to identify where he was staying.

Later he said he was staying at a motel under guard of federal marshals.

FIGURES IDENTIFIED

During the state's questioning Pitts identified several figures in the White Knights at the time he was a member including the then second ranking official who he said was called the grand dragon.

"Who was that?," Finch asked.

"L. E. Mathews from Jackson," Pitts said.

Mathews, an electrical contractor in a Jackson suburb, is believed by the FBI to be presently the imperial wizard of the remaining forces of the White Knights.

Describing the initiation ceremony of the White Knights, Pitts said that prospective members were brought before a table "with a white table cloth and a Bible opened to the 12th chapter of Romans. They had a sword or a long knife laying across the Bible and a pistol laying beside it."

Asked what the significance of the pistol was, Pitts said "it was supposed to be a Christian military organization."

The second automobile used

in the Dahmer mission, he told the court, was driven by Clifford Wilson, a young Laurel businessman who shortly after the Dahmer slaying was given "the distinguished service award" in his home town by the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

Wilson is among the group of men who were later arrested and indicted by this state in the Dahmer killing. His trial last year ended with a hung jury.

'PAYMENTS' HIT

Defense attorney Arrington hit hard at the fact that Pitts had been paid by the federal government and also produced a federal photograph which had been made by telescopic camera of Pitts and a girl friend around a swimming pool at a Jackson motel.

Pitts admitted he had been staying for some time in an apartment at the Jackson motel with two marshals constantly on duty in an adjoining bedroom.

The defense put on three witnesses before circuit Judge Stanton Hall recessed court shortly after 6 p.m. until Friday morning.

The three witnesses—Herman Jackson, a cousin and close friend of Deavours Nix and Mr. and Mrs. D. C. Henton—all said they would not believe Pitts under oath.

Five character witnesses, meantime, testified for Bowers and said their opinion of him would not be changed even if they knew him to be the head of the White Knights.

Two Negroes, one a retired railroad worker and the other a young woman beauty operator, are sitting on the 12-member jury hearing the state's attempt to convict Bowers of murder in the Dahmer slaying.

Last year another jury had been deadlocked reportedly 11 to 1 for conviction of Bowers on the charge of arson for the same case.